The Bloomfield Record.

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1875.

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Written for the Bloomfield Record.

ALMOST A TRAGEDY.

BY MARGARET.

"What poor, short-sighted worms we be,
For we can't calculate."

Oh Widow Bedott, how profound was thy philosophy, how keen thy insight into the perverse windings of this crooked path through life! How firm and orthodox thy belief in the total depravity of inanimate things! Casting about for expletives with which to relieve my pent-up feelings, your famous rhyme comes to me as an inspiration. My story is soon told.

Matilda was going to have a party. Matilda is my dear, particular, intimate, confidential friend. To be sure, she only moved into the place a month ago, but we were struck with each other at first sight, and since that time have exchanged photographs, locks of hair, confidences, and notes innumerable, and have sworn eternal friendship. Matilda has a brother, handsome, and a senior, who was coming home on vacation from College, and in his honor was the party to come off. Of course I was prime minister on the occasion. Together we made out the list of invitations,—decorated rooms, the last with the help of the young Collegian, who knew how to make himself useful as well as agreable.

The eventful evening had come. Serene and complaisant I stood in my dressing-room surrounded by the paraphernalia wherewith to get up a gorgeous appearance. Mother stood by, best of waiting-maids, ready to hand pins and wield brushes, and I had just let down my hair, and was about to yield it up to her skillful fingers to be frizzed and curled, twisted and braided and bunched into the prevailing mode. The one personal attraction of which I had reason to be vain was my long, light, abundant hair. Painful to relate, I am not a beauty, so it was only a pardonable satisfaction that I took in this single bestowal of nature's bounty. But now came about the most horrible catasthophe. Little brother, aged four,—(it always is little brother when any catasthophe happens at our house)—had crept in at the door to spy out the land with an eye to mischief. The when, the how, the wherefore of it, I cannot tell you. Before I knew that the child was in the room, I was startled by seeing him astride the back of a rocking chair, which was slipping from under him,—he frantically clutching at something on the Bureau, which something proved to be a tall kerosene lamp. Over it and he came, with a crash, and the quick flame brushed my floating hair!

The horror and fear of the moment was quickly over, for I felt myself forthwith smothered in a hugh blanket and drenched with a sudden shower bath. But what a looking creature emerged from that wet blanket! I looked in the glass, and shrieked with dismay! Such singed, stiff and bristly locks, such horrid bare patches all over my unlucky pate, such a dripping, limp, and starchless creature was appalling to behold! Oh little brother! Little brother! It was in no Sir Isaac Newton temper that I gazed upon your apprehensive countenance. Tommy recognized the vindictive expression, waited for no sympathy for bumps and bruises, but scud from the room like a sail before the wind.

"Not go to that party! Disappoint my dear Matilda! Miss that first waltz with the young Collegian! Not I! I will go." I announced with determination, "if I go scalpless," and strode up and down the room by way of emphasis.

Mothers are fairies, we all know that, and mine was a practical, common-sense fairy, and obliging enough to own a few extra braids and curls of precisely the same shade as my own. Of course, like a dutiful mother, she quickly took them from her own head, and skillfully transferred them to mine, tucking away beneath them my poor, scanty, singed locks. The frowsy appearance about the temples, was, of course, all in the style. I remorselessly jammed in hairpins till my poor, tortured scalp ached, but stood triumphant at last, a crowned, chignoned creature. The rest of the toilette was soon completed. Flounced and ruffled, looped and sashed—I was finally ready, and soon reached the scene of action, smiling, though apprehensive.

I had a good time at that party! I danced and flirted in sublime unconsciousness of danger. I suppose the guests at the table of Damocles were just as jolly and reckless as though that sword had not been hanging over their heads, and so was I, though my head was in a precarious situation. "What poor, short-sighted worms we be."

Once, indeed, I came near betraying myself. It was in the crowded supper-room, and a waiter, elbowing his way along, bumbed up against that ill-fated chignon. Involuntarily, and quicker than a flash, up went both hands to my head with an exclamation. The consternation depicted on the face of the youth with whom I was talking, was comical to behold. Whether he thought that I was subject to spasms of neuralgia, or had suddenly been bereft of my senses, I don't know, and don't care—for there was worse to come.

After supper we all grew very hilarious and informal. In fact, a stickler for etiquette might have been shocked at our mad-cap freaks. The snap-mottoes were passed around, and mine popped out, a jaunty, little Normandy Cap. I was putting it on, when Matilda rushed up. "I should like to know," she cried, "why in the world you have tortured your hair into such a ridiculous style to-night; any-one with such magnificent hair as you should make the most of it. It must come down instantly to suit your cap," and the impulsive girl snatched at my braids. In vain I clutched her hands. She had no idea what a frightful disclosure she was about to make. The pins had been loosened by dancing and exercise,—the braids came off in her hands.

I shall never forget to the longest day of my life, the horrid stillness that fell upon that roomful of people,—the blank amazement on Matilda's face,—the pitifully funny picture that the long mirror opposite me revealed. Here let the curtain fall. The moral runs—

"Can't calculate with no precision
On aught beneath the sky,
And so I've come to the decision
That t'aint worth while to try.

Aged Beauty.

History is full of the accounts of the fascination of women who were no longer young. Thus Helen of Troy was over forty when she perpetrated the most famous elopement on record, and as the siege of Troy lasted a decade she could not have been very juvenile when the ill-fortune of Paris restored her to her husband who is reported to have received her with unquestioning love and gratitude. Pericles wedded Aspasia when she was thirty-six, and yet she afterwards for thirty years or more wielded an undiminished reputation for beauty. Cleopatra was past thirty when Antony fell under her spell, which never lessened until her death, nearly ten years afterwards; and Livia was thirty-three when she won the heart of Augustus, over whom she maintained her ascendancy to the last. Turning to more modern history, where it is possible to verify dates more accurately, we have the extraordinary Diane de Poitiers, who was thirty-six when Henry II. (then Duke of Orleans, and just half her age) became attached to her; and she was held as first lady and most beautiful woman at court up to the period of the monarch's death and the accession to power of Catherine of Medicis. Anne of Austria was thirty-eight when she was described as the handsomest queen of Europe, and when Buckingham and Richelieu were her jealous admirers. Ninon de n'Enclos, the most celebrated wit and beauty of her day, was the idol of three generations of the golden youth of France, and she was seventy-two when the Abbe de Berias fell in love with her. True it is that in the case of this lady a rare combination of culture, talents, and personal attractions endowed their possessor seemingly with the gifts of eternal youth. Bianco Capello was thirty-eight when the Grand Duke Francisco of Florence fell captive to her charms, and made her his wife, though he was five years her junior. Louis XIV. wedded Mdme. de Maintenon when she was forty-three years of age. Catherine II. of Russia was thirty-three when she seized the empire of Russia, and captivated the dashing young General Orloff. Up to the time of her death (at sixty-seven) she seemed to have retained the same bewitching powers, for the lamentations were heartfelt among all those who had ever known her personally. Mdlle. Mars, the celebrated French tragedienne, only attained the zenith of her beauty and power between forty and forty-five. At that period the loveliness of her hands and arms especially was celebrated throughout Europe. The famous Mdme. Recamier was thirty-eight when Barras was ousted from power, and she was without dispute declared to be the most beautiful women in Europe, which rank she held for fifteen years.

Do it Well.

Whatever you do, do it well. A job slighted, because it is apparently unimportant, leads to habitual neglect, so that men degenerate, insensibly, into bad workmen.

"That is a good rough job," said a foreman in our hearing recently; and he meant that it was a piece of work not elegant in itself, but strongly made and well put together.

Training the hand and eye to do work well leads individuals to form correct habits in other respects; and a good workman is, in most cases a good citizen.

No one need hope to rise above his present situation who suffers small things to pass by unimproved, or who neglects, metaphorically speaking, to pick up a farthing because it is not a shilling.

Take heart, all who toil; all youths in humble situations, all in adverse circumstances and those who labor unappreciated. If it be but to drive the plow, strive to do it well; if it be but to wax thread, wax it well; if only to cut bolts, make good ones; or to blow the bellows, keep the iron hot. It is attention to business that lifts the feet higher up on the ladder.

"KITTY'S FORTY."

BY EDWARD EGGLESTON.

It doesn't do men any good to live apart from women and children. I never know a boy's school in which there was not a tendency to rowdyism, and lumbermen and sailors, fishermen and other men that live only with men, are proverbially a half bear sort of people. Frontiersmen soften down when women and children come—but I forgot myself, it is the story you want.

Burton and Jones lived in a shanty by themselves. Jones was a married man, and finding it hard to support his wife in a "down-east village," he had emigrated to Northern Minnesota, leaving his wife under her father's roof until he should be able to "make a start." He and Burton had gone into partnership and had pre-empted a town site of three hundred and twenty acres. There were perhaps twenty families scattered sparsely over this town site at the time my story begins.

The parties had disagreed, quarreled and divided their interests. The land was also shared between them, except one valuable forty-acre piece. Each of them claimed that piece of land, and the quarrel had grown so high between them that the neighbors expected them to shoot at sight. In fact, it was understood that Burton was on the forty acre place, determined to shoot Jones if he came, and Jones had sworn to go out there and shoot Burton, when the fight was postponed by the unexpected arrival of Jones's wife and child.

Jones's shanty was not finished, and he was forced to forget the luxury of fighting his old partner in his exertions to make wife and baby comfortable for the night. For the winter sun was surrounded by "sun-bugs." Instead of one sun, there were four, an occurrence not uncommon in this latitude, but one which always bodes a terrible storm.

In his endeavors to care for his wife and child, Jones was mollified a little, and half regretted he had been so violent about the piece of land. But he was determined not to be backed down, and would certainly have to shoot Burton or be shot himself.

When he thought of the chance of being killed by his old partner the prospect was not pleasant. He looked westfully at Kitty, his two-year-old child, and dreaded that she should be left fatherless. Nevertheless, he wouldn't be backed down. He would shoot or be shot.

While the father was cutting wood, and the mother was busy otherwise, little Kitty managed to get the shanty door open.

There was no latch as yet, and her prying little fingers easily swung it back. A gust of cold air almost took her breath away, but she caught sight of the brown grass without, and the new world seemed so big that the little feet were fain, to try and explore it.

She pushed out through the door, caught her breath again, and started away, down a path bordered by sere grass and the dead stalks of the wild flowers.

How often she had longed to escape from restraint, and paddle out into the world alone! So out into the world she went, rejoicing in her liberty, in the blue sky above and the rusty prairie beneath. She would find out where the path went, and that was at the end of the world! What did she care if her nose was blue with cold, and her chubby hands red as beets? Now and then she paused to turn her head away from a rude blast, a forerunner of the storm, but having gasped a moment, she quitly renewed her brave march in search of the great unknown. The mother missed her, but supposed that Jones, who could not get enough of the child's society, had taken the little pet out with him.

Jones, poor fellow, sure that the darling was safe within, chopped away until that awful storm broke upon him, and at last drove him, half smothered by snow and half frozen with cold, into the house. When there was nothing left but retreat, he had seized armful of wood and carried it into the house with him to make sure of having enough to keep Kitty and his wife from freezing in the coming awfulness of the night, which now settled down upon the storm-beaten and snow-blinded world.

It was the beginning of that horrible storm in which so many people were frozen to death, and Jones fled none too soon.

When once the wood was stacked by the stove, Jones looked around for Kitty. He had no more than inquired for her when father and mother read in each other's face the fact that she was lost in this wild, dashing storm of snow.

So fast did the snow fall, and so dark was the night, that Jones could not see three feet ahead of him. He endeavored to follow the path which he thought Kitty might have taken, but it was buried in snow-drifts, and he soon lost himself.

He stumbled through the drifts, calling out to Kitty in his distress, but not knowing whither he went. After an hour of despairing wandering and shouting, he came upon a house, and having rapped upon the door he found himself face to face with his wife.

He had returned to his own house in his bewilderment.

When we remember that Jones had not slept for two nights preceding this one, on account of his mortal quarrel with Burton, and had now been beating against an arctic hurricane and tramping through treacherous billows of snow for an hour, we cannot wonder that he fell over his own threshold in a state of extreme exhaustion.

Happy for him that he did not fall bewildered on the prairie, as many another poor wayfarer did on that fatal night.

As it was, his wife must needs give up the vain searches she had been making in the neighborhood of the shanty. She had a sick husband, with frozen hands and feet and face, to care for.

Every minute the thermometer fell lower and lower, and all the heat the little cook stove in Jones' shanty could give would hardly keep them from freezing.

Burton had stayed on that forty acre lot all day, waiting for a chance to shoot his old partner, Jones. He had not heard of the arrival of Jones' wife, and he concluded that his enemy was a coward, and left him in possession, or else he meant to play him some treacherous trick on his way home.

So Burton resolved to keep a sharp lookout. But he soon found that impossible, for the storm was upon him in all its blinding fury. He tried to follow the path, but he could not find it. Had he been less of a frontiersman he must have perished there, within a furlong of his own house. But in endeavoring to keep the direction of the path, he heard a smothered cry, and saw something rise up covered with snow, and then fall down again. He raised his gun to shoot it, when the creature uttered another wailing cry, so human that he put down his gun and went cautiously forward.

It was a child!

He did not remember that there was such a child among all the settlers at Newton. But he did not stop to ask questions. He must, without delay, get himself and the child, too, to a place of safety, or both would be frozen.

So he took the little thing in his arms and started through the drifts. And the child, putting its little icy finger on Burton's rough cheek, murmured "papa!" And Burton held her closer and fought the snow more courageously than ever.

He found the shanty at last, and rolled the child in a buffalo robe while he made a fire. Then, when he got the room a little warm, he took the little thing upon his knees, dipped her aching fingers in cold water, and asked her what her name was.

"Kitty," she said.

"Kitty," he said, "and what else?"

"Kitty," she answered, nor could he find out any more.

"Whose Kitty are you?"

"Your Kitty," she said. For she had known her father but that one day, and now she believed Burton was he.

Burton sat up all night and stuffed wood into his impotent little stove to keep from freezing to death. Never having anything to do with children he firmly believed that Kitty, sleeping snugly under blankets and buffalo robes, would freeze if he should let the fire subside in the least.

As the storm prevailed with unabated fury the next day, and as he dared neither take her out or leave her alone, he stayed by her all day, and stuffed the stove with wood, and laughed at her droll baby talk, and fed her on biscuit, fried bacon and coffee.

On the morning of the second day the storm had subsided. It was forty degrees cold, but knowing somebody must be mourning Kitty for dead, he wrapped her in skins, and with much difficulty reached the nearest neighbor's house, suffering only a frost bite on his nose by the way.

"That child," said the woman to whose house he had gone, "is Jones's. I see 'em take her outer the wagon day before yesterday."

Burton looked at Kitty a moment in perplexity, then rolled her up again and started out, "traveling like mad," the woman said, as she watched him.

When he reached Jones's he found Jones and his wife sitting in utter wretchedness by the fire. They were both sick from grief, and unable to move out of the house. Kitty they had given up for buried under some snow mound. They would find her when the spring should come and melt the snow cover off.

When the exhausted Burton came in with his bundle of buffalo skins, they looked at him with amazement. But when he opened it and let out little Kitty, and said:

"Here, Jones, is this your pet Kitten?" Mrs. Jones couldn't think of anything better to do than to scream.

And Jones got up and took his old partner's hand and said. "Burton, ole fellow!" and then choked up, and sat down and cried helplessly.

And Burton said, "Jones old fellow, you may have that forty acre patch. It come mighty nigh makin' me the murderer of that little Kitty's father."

"No, you shall take it yourself," cried Jones, "if I have to go to law to make you."

And Jones actually deeded his interest in the forty acres to Burton. But Burton transferred it all to Kitty.

This is why this part of Newton is called "Kitty's Forty."

Paragraphics.

In some of the new styles there is no change. Poor relatives are eat the same as last year.

A little girl's definition of ice—water that staid out in the cold and went to sleep.

Man may learn wisdom from a postage stamp. It sticks to its legitimate business. Letters profit by it.

A cash system is one where a man pays for all he gets and runs the chances of getting all he pays for.

"What station do you call this?" said a man, as he crawled out of the debris of a railroad smash-up. "Devastation," replied the conductor.

An exchange speaks of a lady who has returned from a course of musical instruction in Europe with two stories and a French roof added to her voice.

A Scotch divine recently praying said: "Oh Lord, give unto us neither poverty nor riches," and pausing solemnly a moment, he added, "especially poverty."

A rude fellow told Barnum that he had never exhibited anything that was not a barefaced humbug. "Yes I have," said Barnum, "the bearded lady wasn't barefaced."

Three Chicago girls are about opening a barber's shop. One is to do the lathering, another the shaving, while a third is to sit on a sort of a throne and play on a harp.

The young man who resolved to commit suicide because his sweetheart married an undertaker, owes his life to the second sober thought that he might be furnishing his rival a job.

That was a gross libel on the spare young man who sat down on an inverted flour barrel, and arose with the information pasted conspicuously on his person, "warranted 196 lbs."

"There was an old fuel between them," was what a witness in a Chicago murder case said to the jury. The judge asked her if she didn't mean "feud," and she asked him "who was telling the story."

The clumsy style of dancing now in vogue in which people merely shuffle about the floor, pushing one foot after the other, seems to have come from Paris; for they have it there, and they call these ambitious young gent'emen "floor polishers."

Perplexed Schneider, who had made a garment for a youth, and found himself unable to dispose of the surplus fullness which appeared when trying it on the young candidate, declared vociferously: "De coat is goot! Is no fault of de coat, De boy is too tin."

An Illinois court has rendered a curious decision. A boot dealer in Plano sold a man a pair of boots, both lefts. The purchaser clamored for his rights, but the court decided that a pair of boots was a pair of boots, and if a man had to wear them both on one foot it was a case which the laws of Illinois could not reach.

"Doctor," said a wealthy patient to his physician, "I want you to be thorough. Strike at the root of the disease." "Well, I will," said the doctor, as he lifted his cane, brought it down hard enough to break into pieces a bottle and glasses which stood upon the side-board. It was his last professional visit to that house.

Kate, in a note from Brooklyn, expresses her wonder that men, generally, are not better skilled in the art of looking at a pretty woman in the street cars. She says that all girls are pleased to have their attractions recognized in a certain gentle way—the eyes lingering for an instant only—but that a prolonged stare from a man, no matter how handsome he may be, excites nothing but a feeling of annoyance and disgust.

A Rockland county (N. Y.) girl, who was recently "finished" at a fashionable seminary, has begun a diary. Her mischievous young brother cut out the first entry and it got into print. Here is a portion of it: "Sunday Night.—It has just struck 12 and I am still writing. What are these thoughts that surge across my heart? What is this strange longing after the unattainable? Am I what I really seem, or is it, as it were, not so much the infinitesimal as the unspeakable? Let me be calm. I have read Don Juan to day. Ah! alas! will there ever be another Byron? May there not be somewhere, coming toward me from the mist of the mountain top, or the flowers of the valley some sun-crowned youth, who—"

Starting Out.

Nothing is more interesting than to see a man in the first intensity of a new enterprise; it may be a new cider mill; it may be a new newspaper. It is a great crisis in that man's life. He lives thirty days in one. Old, trite proverbs take on new and startling meanings. He looks upon all men and all things in a strange new light. He judges all men and all things with regard to the accomplishment of this one, supreme design. During a certain time the stars in their courses fight for him; then the very unive se changes its direction, and pushes with all its weight against his tottering walls; another change and a thousand accidents are in his favor. He does not know till years afterward with what concentration he labored in those days of beginning. He smiles at himself, and tells pleasant stories of his makeshifts and absorption and now when he sees another and younger person starting his cider mill, with the old and wornout enthusiasm, he looks on with the same sympathetic, half cynical interest with which an old married couple contemplate two young people who have just fallen in love.

More Comfortable.

There is a good joke on a professor in Paris Ill. In the summer he went to Chicago to attend some sort of an educational meeting and retiring for the night, he found that the room was rather close, and had his room-mate to get up and open the window; he found the window, but could not raise it, so the professor told him to knock a pane out; he did so, and returned to bed. The professor concluded that the room was still too close to suit him, so he got up and kicked out another pane of glass, and said, "That feels more comfortable," and went to bed and enjoyed the ventilated room. On getting up in the morning they discovered they had smashed the glass in the door of a book-case.

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